DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 321 471 EC 231 591

AUTHOR Painter, William E., Jr.
TITLE Development of an Adoption Agency as Supplement to Current Services of a Residential Group Care Facility.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 27p.; Practicum Report, Nova University.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Practicum Papers (043) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adoption; *Agencies; *Child Abuse; *Child Welfare; Group Homes; *Organizational Development; Placement; Program Development; Residential Programs; *Sexual Abuse

ABSTRACT

The paper presents a proposal for the addition of a specialized adoption agency for sexually abused children and youth to current services of a residential group home. The proposal resulted from the lack of appropriate families for children completing the Agency's Preparation for Adoption Program. Evidence suggested placements have been hindered by misinformation concerning disruptions of adoptive placements, lack of knowledge of the specific children by adoption workers, and inadequate understanding of parenting such children. The proposed agency would recruit, train, and provide follow-up services for prospective adoptive families. A 10-week needs assessment with 15 referral agencies overwhelmingly supported the development of an adoption agency specifically designed to provide adoption services for the older, sexually abused child. Recommendations include development of a budget of anticipated expenses and revenue and investigation of how implementation of such an agency would impact the current residential facility. The Needs Profile is appended. Includes 11 references. (DB)

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Development of an Adoption Agency as Supplement to Current Services of a Residential Group Care Facility

by

WILLIAM E. PAINTER, JR.

COHORT 34

A Practicum Proposal Presented to the National Master's Program for Child Care Administrators in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the degree of Master of Science

NOVA UNIVERSITY

1990

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AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

I hereby testify that this paper and the work it reports are entirely my own. Where it has been necessary to draw from the work of others, published or unpublished, I have acknowledged such work in accordance with accepted scholarly and editorial practice. I give testimony freely, out of respect for the scholarship of other workers in the field and in the hope that my own work, presented here, will earn similar respect.

3/16/90
Date

William Elliott Painter Jr.
Signature of Student

Abstract

A Protocol for Development of An Adoption Agency as a Complement to Current Services of a Residential Group Care Facility. Painter, William E. Jr., 1990: Practicum Report, Nova University, Master's Program for Child Care Administrators. Descriptors: Recruitment / Training / Selection / Adoption / Child Abuse / Youth / Placement / Program Development.

The shortage of adoptive parents trained and prepared to successfully parent sexually abused children/youth indicated a need for this residential group care facility to develop a proposal for the addition of a specialized adoption agency as an adjunct to current agency services.

The author developed a proposal for the addition of a specialized adoption agency based upon extensive research and a needs assessment of referral sources. The plan for the addition of the adoption agency was therefore based upon not only the agency's own experience in placement of the graduates of its Preparation for Adoption Program, but also upon the needs of the referral agencies.

The project was received favorably by the referral sources, state licensing consultants,the agency's Executive Director, and the agency's Board of Directors. This resulted in continued movement toward the addition of a specialized adoption agency as an additional program service.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Setting

The work setting is a residential group care facility with a licensed capacity of 60 children. The agency maintains a 90-95 percent occupancy. The agency is located in a rural mountainous county of a large southeastern state. Major metropolitan areas are at least one and one/half driving hours away.

A pioneering effort in the development of a program to aid in preparation for adoption of multi-placement, disruptive, older children make this agency unique. Utilization of Positive Peer Culture programming also establishes this agency as programmatically risk-taking in its state, since it was the first to move in this direction.

Writer's Role

The writer is the Program Director in this work setting. Responsibilities formally include development and implementation of program services offered by this agency. Philosophy and program goals are a major area of focus for the writer. The writer is responsible for making recommendations concerning program direction and/or changes to the Executive Director and Board of Directors. Of

critical importance to the writer is that the implementation of all phases of program service be centered around and easily discernable as supportive of the philosophy and program goals.

The writer brings to the work setting specialized training in the field of working with children who have experienced multiple rejection. Twelve years of experience in residential group care have enabled this writer to have direct service contact with over six hundred children. The writer is a frequent workshop leader and conference speaker on the topic of working with multiple rejected, sexually abused children in preparing them for adoption.

The writer's development of a specialized program to facilitate the grieving process for unattached and rage-filled children, and the writer's experience as an adoptive parent, gives the writer a penchant for understanding and zeal for sharing what "works" for the adoptive parent.

Chapter 2

STUDY OF PROBLEM

Problem Definition

Graduates of the agency's Preparation for Adoption program are in need of families prepared to parent them. There is an insufficient number of families referred for the children and those referred have no real understanding or training in the parenting needs of multiply rejected, sexually abused children. Adequate follow up or support for the families that do adopt these children does not exist as most adoption workers have no real experience or understanding of the parenting needs of the multiply rejected, sexually abused child. Subsequently, they do not adequately coach/support the adoptive parents in times of crisis.

Evidence

This agency's and the author's experience since implementation of the Preparation for Adoption Program indicates several problems with regard to family placement for the graduates of the program. There has not been a sufficient number of families referred for the number of children prepared to enter them. Those families that are referred have little or no understanding of the needs of the

abused and multiple family placed child (Donley, K., 1980). Studies indicate that a significant percentage of adoption disruptions occur for children who have been abused and have had multiple placements (Partridge, 1986). Studies also indicate that the greater need is for improving the quality of service the adoption worker provides, rather than for increasing the quantity of services provided (Festinger, 1986).

Analysis of Causes

In 1980 more than 120,000 children were waiting to be adopted (Spencer, 1980). Most of these would be defined as older: ages two to eighteen. Most will be placed by state adoption workers and most will have histories and behaviors which are indicative of sexual abuse. Although estimates are that 500,000 families are awaiting children to adopt, huge numbers of older, special needs children are waiting for family placements. In 1985, 79 percent of the children awaiting adoption had been waiting more than six months (Godbold, 1990). Many are in agencies such as the one at which the author works. Misinformation relative to the number of disruptions of adoptive placements seems to reinforce fears of both workers and prospective adoptive parents (Festinger, 1986). Recruitment efforts for adoptive families for these children are hindered by this misinformation, in addition to the adoption workers' lack of practical knowledge of the children for whom they have the responsibility of family placement. Some residential

treatment agencies have found that in becoming a licensed adoption agency the number of successful adoptive placements of their residents has increased (Weitzel, 1984). This seems to indicate that an inadequate day-by-day knowledge of the child and a lack of understanding of the parenting needs of the sexually abused, multiply rejected child hinders recruitment and placement efforts.

An inadequate understanding of how a parent needs to respond to the crises precipitated by the behaviors of the child placed in the adoptive family also seems to hinder successful placement. Often the adoption workers have no real experience and/or training in how to respond to these situations, which further compounds the problem.

Relationship to the Literature

The problem is further complicated by the fact that adoption workers are often looking for, or trying to recruit a totally inappropriate family (Wolff, 1980). The behaviors the child presents are most often the result of their past history of sexual abuse and not necessarily an indication for disruption to occur. Adoption workers often indicate disruption as necessary when children express themselves through these learned sexual behaviors (Duehn, 1989). Lack of understanding of the special parenting needs of the sexually abused child seems to be a critical element resulting in disruption of adoptive placements of these children (Partridge, 1986). Quality training for adoptive parents and support relevant to the needs of the sexually

abused child are critical needs in the field of adoption (de Young, 1984).

In addition, child services systems are overwhelmed by the task and the numbers of children needing families trained to provide care. The numbers of trained families are not keeping pace with the number of children coming into care (Godbold, 1990).

Chapter 3

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal

The goal was to develop a licensed adoption agency as an adjunct service to current programming of the residential group care agency. The additional agency would recruit, train, and provide follow-up services for the prospective adoptive families of the graduates of this agency's preparation for adoption program if so requested by a child's legal custodian.

Objectives

The objectives of this practicum were:

1) Within a ten week period the author will increase the awareness of the referral agencies of this agency's expertise in the abused, multiply rejected, older child's adoption needs as measured by the needs profile designed by the author.

2) Over a ten week period the author will determine the need for the development of an adoption agency, as perceived by the referral sources and state licensing consultants, to be measured by information gathered from the

needs profile designed by the author.

3) Within this same time period the author will determine the feasibility of cost payment by the referral agency for utilization of an adoption agency as measured by the compilation of information gathered from the needs profile designed by the author.

Evaluation Method

The author utilized a needs assessment profile designed by the author to provide information concerning potential utilization of an adoption agency service complement (Appendix A). The instrument was designed to reflect current usage and satisfaction of program services as well as projected usage of an adoption agency complement. The author met personally with adoption worker supervisors of 15 county departments of social services that currently utilize the residential care program of the agency to complete the needs assessment profile. The author also met with the state licensing consultants to gather information concerning adoption agency development.

Chapter 4

SOLUTION STRATEGIES

Information Collection

Some agencies that provide residential group care for troubled children who are victims of rejection and abuse have started their own adoption agencies to aid in provision of family placement (Weitzel, 1989). The writer traveled to Michigan to visit one of these agencies and gathered information by meeting with the Executive Director and staff.

The writer personally met with the appropriate state licensing personnel to gather information concerning creating an adoption agency.

The writer did a literature review concerning adoption recruitment, training, and aftercare for families of sexually abused children.

The writer gathered information from literature and from other adoption specialists concerning the development of an adoption agency.

Solution Strategy

The solution to the problem of the insufficient amount of adequately-prepared adoptive families was to start a licensed adoption agency as a supplement to the present

program. Agencies that have done such have significantly increased the number of successful adoptive placements (Weitzel, 1989).

Implementation Plan

The author met with 15 county departments of social services that are referral sources for the agency. A needs profile form was utilized to assess potential need for a specialized adoption agency. The author reviewed literature to aid in the development of the proposal for a specialized adoption agency and visited a residential group care facility in Michigan that had already developed an adoption agency to complement current residential services. The author gathered information to aid in the proposal and budget development. The author met with state licensing consultants to gather information concerning the need for and process of developing an adoption agency.

Calendar Plan

Week One — The author visited and met with staff at a residential group care facility that has developed an adoption agency as an adjunct service. The author devised a needs profile form (Appendix A).

Week Two — The author met and shared with two departments of social services to complete the needs assessment.

Week Three — The author met and shared with two departments of social services to complete the needs assessment.

Week Four — The author met and shared with two departments of social services to complete the needs assessment.

Week Five — The author met and shared with the staff of a department of social services to complete the needs assessment.

The author met with the appropriate state licensing consultants to share and gather information concerning adoption agency development.

Week Six — The author met and shared with two departments of social services to complete the needs assessment. The author developed preliminary purpose, mission, and philosophy statements for the proposed adoption agency.

Week Seven — The author met and shared with two departments of social services to complete the needs assessment.

Week Eight — The author met and shared with two departments of social services to complete the needs assessment.

Week Nine — The author met and shared with two departments of social services to complete the needs assessment.

The author developed a time-line and sample budget for the proposed adoption agency.

Week Ten — The author prepared a report concerning this project to be shared with the Family Services Committee of the Board of Directors of the agency at their March 1990 meeting.

Chapter 5

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

Significant progress was achieved toward the goal of the development of a licensed adoption agency as an adjunct service to current programming of the residential group care agency. All of the objectives were achieved with clear indicators that the goal was not only desirable, but needed in this state. The agency assigned a social worker to continue this project toward implementation.

The author was able to meet personally with adoption supervisors and staff of 15 referral agencies. These meetings generally lasted a minimum of two hours and involved lively discussion of the agency's current services and the feasibility of the addition of an adoption agency as a complement to the current services. These discussion times facilitated an increased awareness on the part of the referral agencies of the expertise this agency has in the adoption needs of the abused, multiply-rejected, older child. The personal response of the author to their questions was well-received, especially as some misunderstandings and sources of confusion were clarified. The end results were assertions, on the part of these adoption supervisors, for continued usage of this

residential facility.

The needs profile analysis overwhelmingly supported the need for the development of an adoption agency specifically designed to provide adoption services for the older, sexually abused child. State licensing consultants were very supportive of the concept, a new one for this state. During the meeting with these consultants, detailed discussion of the proposal was shared, followed by detailed delivery of the specific guidelines necessary for the licensing of the proposed adjunct service. Part of the process of the interview with the state consultants included discussion of ways to facilitate licensing of adoption program services similar to those at a residential facility in Michigan that was visited by the author. This discussion served as a "brainstorming" session, since a residential facility licensed for the particular continuum of services described does not currently exist in this state. The consultants followed up on the meeting with a letter detailing some specific processing involved in the development of the adoption agency and a pledge to aid in the process.

The meetings with the individual county adoption supervisors and staff were most productive in determining the potential for utilization for this proposed specialized adoption agency. Opportunities occurred for sharing the author's concepts of how this service would function. Lively question and answer time invariably followed, with

the author being able to share details concerning the residential facility visited in Michigan and that agency's results with the proposed type of adoption agency. The incorporation of an adoption agency into a residential facility's services allows for considerable creativity and deviation from the traditional process of adoption for the older, abused child. The residential agency has automatically at its disposal, significant resources for recruitment, training and follow-up services for adoptive families. The adoption supervisors the author met with were delighted at these concepts and heartily supportive for the development of the agency and projected utilization of it. They were asked to share in detail their concerns, fears, and questions, which gave the author valuable information for the development of an adoption agency.

Determining the feasibility of cost payment by the referral agencies for utilization of the adoption agency is at this point incomplete. Preliminary information indicates that all referring agencies could pay the sum of $1,800 which is currently reimbursed by the state for adoption services. Most all indicated that procurement of county funds might be possible. Thus the minimum amount indicated was $1,800 and the maximum indicated by a single county was $4,400. Determination of the actual cost of providing these services is yet to be determined. A preliminary compilation of information from private, for-profit, adoption agencies indicate a cost range from $8,000 to $30,000 per placement.

An effort to provide adoption services at a considerably lower rate may be possible as this agency is non-profit. In that provision of this adoption service will incorporate inclusion of the training and follow-up services to adoptive parents into current residential programming and residential staff's responsibilities, the actual cost to the agency is difficult to forecast. Hiring of an M.S.W. with experience as an adoption worker and determining physical needs costs are relatively easy to ascertain. However, even given this information, the determination of whether referral services could pay cost of service has yet to be determined.

Conclusions

Development of a specialized adoption agency to complement the agency's current services is a worthy goal. The needs assessment profile gathered from referral sources indicates not only the need for such but also their intended utilization of such a service. A thorough literature review indicates a growing need for alternatives other than institutional care for the older sexually abused child.

Without programs to train and support parents who will adopt these youth, most of them will not be considered for family placement.

Successful precedence has been set for development of the proposed specialized adoption agency as a continuum of services for a residential facility. Support from state licensing consultants is in place even though this venture would be the first of its kind for a residential facility in

this state. Particular facets of how the adoption agency should function were conceptualized. Of significant importance to all from whom information was sought, were the issues of specialized training and ongoing follow-up after the child's placement.

It can be concluded that for the adoption agency to be effective and successful it must not duplicate existing adoption agency services in the state, but rather specialize in placement of older, abused children/youth. The information gathered from the residential facility, which has such a service in place, confirmed the author's desire of having the adoption agency built into and incorporated into the current residential programming model. The plan would be for the adoption agency to be consistent in philosophy with the residential facility. The residential facility staff would provide the bulk of the adoptive parent training and follow-up as an ongoing part of the residential agency's program.

Recommendations

The author recommends the following:

1. Development of a specialized adoption agency as a complement to current program services should continue.
2. The social worker assigned responsibility for continued study of the project will need to continue the development of a budget relative to anticipated expenses and revenue.

3) The worker should also produce a report that would indicate how the adoption agency, if developed and implemented according to the author's design, would impact the residential facility

Follow-on

A report concerning this project is to be shared with the Program Committee of the Board of Directors of the agency at their March 1990 meeting.

As indicated previously, the Executive Director has approved this proposal for development by hiring an M.S.W. on a part-time basis to continue the project's development.

The state licensing consultants have requested a copy of the report for sharing with local departments.

The Professional Board of Consultants of the agency will be briefed on the project at their next meeting.

The Board of Directors of the agency will have the proposal presented to them in final form for their consideration at the Fall 1990 meeting. Should they approve its implementation, the adoption agency could feasibly provide service in early 1991. To do so would be a considerable step for the heretofore solely residential facility.

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Appendix A

Needs Profile

Needs Profile

1) Has your agency utilized the services of our Preparation for Adoption Program? _____

2) If yes, were you pleased with the services provided?

_____

3) If no, what has been the prohibiting factor? _____

_____

4) Do you see a need in this state for an adoption agency specializing in placement of older child, special needs adoptions? _____

_____

5) If we added an adoption agency specializing in recruitment, training, and aftercare services for families of sexually abused, older children would you utilize this service?

_____

6) What would be the amount of money your agency could provide per child for this service?

_____